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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "LUNCH AT SCHOOL." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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When September rolls around, I always feel a wee bit envious of the youngsters who are going back to school. Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic weren't so much fun--but I always looked forward to recess and the noon hour. And these days, so many children have a really enjoyable noon hour--with a nourishing hot lunch served right at school.

Of course, some schools have been serving hot lunches for a long time--but its just lately that folks have started to think about a real school lunch program all over the country. This year it is expected to reach six million children.

We all know how much this hot lunch means to a child who lives too far away to go home at noon. And it means even more to the child who would have only a skimpy lunch, even if he did go home.

I got so interested in this school lunch program that I did a little scouting around to see who was behind it all, and just how it worked. It seems that parents, teachers, and civic organizations in each community are the sponsors of their own projects. But both Federal and State government agencies are also cooperating. Indeed, much of the food for these lunches comes from farm surpluses--bought by the Surplus Marketing Administration of the Department of Agriculture to help improve selling conditions for farm products.

These surplus commodities are important in making the school lunch program a success. But they will not make up a complete meal--without some additional foods.



So the local groups have the job of getting the food to round out the meals. Sometimes the parents contribute the food, sometimes local business men or civic organizations furnish it. In some districts, benefits are held to raise money and buy the food.

The local groups must also see that the school has the equipment for cooking and serving the lunches. Sometimes they manage to start an up-to-date cafeteria or lunch room. But in many a one-room school, the lunch must be cooked in cramped quarters with very little equipment.

Besides this, there is the matter of labor. In many schools the Work Projects Administration supplies the labor. The National Youth Administration also offers assistance in preparing the lunches. And the children themselves help. Sometimes the boys plant vegetable gardens, and the girls can the garden produce.

In planning the lunches, the local groups have asked for help from food specialists and nutritionists, to be sure that the meals are well-balanced in food values. The lunches must provide the building materials for the soft tissues of the body--for sound teeth and bones--for good red blood. At the same time, the foods must supply a source of energy for growing, active children.

For a really good school lunch, the Federal Bureau of Home Economics recommends one nourishing main dish--a glass or two of milk--a fruit or vegetable cooked or raw--bread and butter or a sandwich--and a simple dessert. Naturally, the pattern of the meal varies according to the food value of the main dish.

This is really a great project when you stop to think what it means to city children who have grown used to a breakfast of bread and coffee--with no milk or fruit. It's much more than a treat for them to have meat loaf, vegetable stew, or eggs for lunch--with plenty of milk to drink. For them it's food to prevent malnutrition--build better, healthier bodies.





Or take the children in rural areas who trudge several miles to school--often over snow-blocked roads. Even if they don't get their entire lunch at school--they can look forward to one hot dish to go with the food they bring from home. The hot food may be soup, cooked cereal, a hot vegetable, or perhaps cocoa. Whatever it is, it will make their lunch more enjoyable and more nutritious.

And even in schools where no hot lunch is served--much can be done to improve the lunches brought from home. In one Wisconsin county, the county home agent and county nurse got good results from a school lunch demonstration. The children now bring more milk, fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain bread in their lunches.

More of the children carry their lunch in metal boxes--instead of in paper bags. And they have each food wrapped separately in paraffin paper. The children have also learned to spread their lunch out on the table--and the noon meal has become a period for promoting good manners as well as good nutrition.

That's the story of the school lunch program. And this year, it is expected to be bigger and better than ever. Hats off to the parents, teachers, and others who are contributing food or money or labor. They're doing their part to start young Americans on the road to good health. For, good nutrition during childhood plays an important part in good health all through life.

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